

The Catalans and Their Dances

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Whoever studied geography and knows anything about Spain usually knows about Barcelona, but very few people know about the Catalans and Catalonia of which Barcelona is the capital city.

Till the times of Fernando and Isabela at the end of the 13th century, the Catalan kingdom was independent. During their reign it became a semi-independent part of unite Aragon-Castille and was such until the 18th century after which period all vestiges of independence disappeared. The same fate holds true for the Balearic Islands, with Mallorca being the largest of these. The history of Mallorca was even more colorful and stormy.

The Catalan historic land is now divided among the French and Spanish, like the Basques on the opposite side of the Peninsula. However, their language covers a much wider territory, not only through historic Catalonia but into Andorra, Navarre, French Bigorre, and even in Sardinia, as far south as Valencia and reaching the Basque and Provence lands. While the Galicans (Spanish, not Polish), Asturians and others are becoming more and more integrated among the Spaniard, the Catalans and Basques stubbornly resisted any Spanish encroachment. With every restriction, both of these peoples fought back stubbornly with a fiercer nationalism and revival of their folklore, using it as the weapon of rebuttal and font of inspiration.

No nation in the world, to our knowledge, has used a simple folk dance for a rallying point. They couldn't use their flags or any other symbol of identity and so they fell back upon their national SARDANA. Even this dance, when the Spaniards discovered it to be the fountain of strength for resistance against complete subjugation and assimilation, tried to prohibit its dancing (Primo De Rivera in 1923), but the ban had to be finally revoked.

The Mediterranean is ringed by a type of partnerless circle dance: the Debkas in Egypt and the Arab world, the Horra in Israel, the Zeybeg and Horon in Turkey, the Horros and Oros in Greece, Rumania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania, the Kolo in Yugoslavia, the Farandole in Provence and the Sardana in far away Catalonia.

From where did the Sardana derive? Is it as ancient as the Catalans themselves or was it imported? It is hard to tell. But the dance was popular in the early part of this millennium. Drawings on parchment, on metal plates and in form of statuary and in architectural capitols one sees figures of Sardana dancers. The name would indicate that it came from Sardinia and it would mean the "Sardinian". And in Sardinia they do dance similar circle dances. Some dance historians think the Sardana to be of Greek origin because of its resemblance (in modified form) to a Greek Syrtos.

The Sardana is not as complicated as the Debkas, Balkan Horo-oros, Kolos or the exertive Provencal Farandole. It is composed of but three steps and variations: (1) Corts or Entrada, (2) Llargs or Reparticio, (3) Contrapunt, Caiguda or Final. "Trencato" steps of "Camades and Girats" makes this section seen like a Charleston. Hands are joined and down for the Corts, up shoulder high for the Llargs and Contrapunts. The traditional sequence is composed of 24 counts for Corts (short) 65 counts for Llargs (Long), that repeated again and then the Contrapunts. All Sardana melodies should follow this sequence. The change from one into the other will be barely discerned to an outsider when listening to the music, but Sardana dancers will be right on their toes.

The movement is erect and the repetition and flow hypnotic. During Fests thousands will gather at the plazas,

form many concentric circles and go from one Sardana into another. They are all the same, but the music changes; the tune is new and of a different name and the dancers are spellbound and animated. This is the national Sardana, the dance that kept the Catalans alive. Many were the books written about the Sardana and the Catalan dance masters created charts and choreographic drawings independent of any other dance notators.

The Sardana is, by no means, the only dance among the Catalan people. The Sardana belongs to their Dansa classification, while anything else of pattern and sequence is called "Ball". The Ball dance is again divided into Ball Senyoral (The elegant type of dance), Ball De Ceremonia of which Espunyollet is one, Balls Espectaculars (Carnival-like dances and demonstrations performed during the Festal days), and the ordinary Balls.

There is a great number of the Ball variety of dance, everyone of which would appeal to the American folk dancer. It has a relationship to the Spanish dance, but neither as intricate or impossible as is much of Spanish dancing. It is definitely an independent dance form.

On Mallorca the Copeo is the most popular form of Ball dance, mostly danced with castanets, however, entirely different of the Spanish form. The castanet strings are placed around both middle fingers of each hand and are not rolled but beaten against the palm, thus, one does not have to spend hours and years to perfect castanet playing but any uninitiated person can easily master it in no time at all.



CATALAN ADAGES

Moltes Miques fan un troc—Many bits make quite a bit.

Morta la cuca, mort el veri—With the death of the vermin dies the poison (irritation).

Musica i flors, conquistan amors—Music and flowers conquer love.

A l'amic i al cavall, no cansa—A friend and a horse never tire.

A les teves coses, tu—Amid your things are you (I'll know what you are by the things you have).

Alegria secreta, alegria incompleta—Secret joys are incomplete.

Cada dia no es festa major—Every day is not a major holiday.

El fer be, mai se perd—Good deeds are never lost.

Quan eu no vol, els sants no pode—When God is unwilling then even the saints are helpless.

Fa de mal ballar amb el ventre buid—It is hard to dance on an empty stomach.

Fret per l'Abril, no faltara pa ni vi—A cold April assured bread and wine.

Hostalera hermosa, mal per a la bossa—Beautiful hotels are bad for the pocket-book.

La vidua rica, amb un ull plora i amb l'altre repica—A rich widow weeps with one eye and ogles with the other.

Mireau lo que bec, i no la sed que patesc—You observe what I drink but not the fact that I thirst.

Ni frare bo per amic, ni molent pere enemic—Neither a good monk for a friend nor a bad one for an enemy.

Secret de dos, es perillos, secret de tres, no val res—A secret shared by two is dangerous, by three is worthless.

—Translated by V. F. Beliajus

CATALAN COSTUMES FROM THE MAINLAND AND MALLORCA

V. F. Beliajus



Left to right: 1) What the best dressed Sardana dancers wear. 2) Mallorcan dancers. 3) A Mallorcan Senyoreta in an historic Rebozilla. 4) Jaime Company, noted Mallorcan dance leader from Palma with some of his pupils. 5) A formal Catalan attire from Barcelona. These pictures were brought back from those places by Comm. Wm. and Mrs. Francis, our cover couple.

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Every group of people, regardless of size, will display regionalism in their costumes. This is true of the Catalans, too. The differences, however, are not as drastic and one will immediately recognize a costume, upon seeing it, that it is a Mainland or Mallorcan costume. Chief characteristics of the Catalan costume is the peculiarly rolled headgear for the male, the nets (Ret) worn behind the head by both (less now by men), their sandals made of wound rope (Espardenyas) and the gauntlets over the women's arms. The unusual lace scarf is the chief characteristic of the Mallorcan woman's headgear.

COSTUMES FOR WOMEN

The Dress—Falda, Foldetas

Catalan: Silk brocades of pastel shades with flower designs seems to be the universal fashion.

Mallorca: The same goes for Mallorca, however, still another dress design is equally popular, especially among the rural folk; simple checkered or striped dresses (See dolls on bottom of cover.)

Aprons—avantall

Catalan: Black lace is the more fashionable, either short or round, or square and nearly as long as the dress. Brocade aprons of a contrasting color are also worn, but the lace is the more popular.

Mallorca: Aprons are not always worn with the brocade dress, though a contrasting brocade apron is occasionally seen. With the checkered or striped dresses the aprons are usually short square ones of a contrasting darker color and usually larger checkers or wider stripes. About three inches on each side of the waist the apron is not sewn to the apron strings and as a result, those aprons seem to hang down straight.

The Bodice—Jipo

There is almost no exception . . . all bodices for Mallorca and the Mainland, are black, of a type like a watered down moire silk, form fitting, short sleeved to elbow, trimmed with lace. Nearly all have a split of about four inches near the elbow, and this opening is buttoned up. The bodice has a short flaring out peplum. In the back, over the seam there is a well-padded pillow-like belt.

The Gauntlets—Guants

These fingerless long gloves are worn by the mainland Catalan women only. They are usually black, with blue occupying a second place and occasionally red, but much rarer. They are knit like a net.

The Hair Net—Ret

The colors of the hair net (Ret or Filet) are the same as that of the gauntlets and it too is worn by the mainland Catalan women only. It nearly reaches the waistline where it terminates with a tassel, while above the forehead a small bow decorates the "ret." For ceremonial dances women wear a type of a mantilla, called "Caputxa."

The Mantell—Rebozilla

This unique headscarf, or veil, is peculiar only with the Mallorcans. There are many ways and styles of fashioning it, but all frame the face, cover much of the head and come down to points, front and rear. They are usually made of white lace, tho exceptions exist.

Shoulder Scarf—Xal

This is mostly worn by the mainland Catalans. Where lace making is predominant the shoulder Xal (Shal-Shawl) is of black lace, draped over in front. Printed material, something like Kashmir, with fringed edges, are likewise popular.

Stocking—Mitja

White in all cases.

Shoes—Espardenya, Sabata

Catalan: The Espardenya is THE thing. The sole is made of rope rolled and wound up and stitched together, with a canvas top over the toes and a canvas back-of-heel. Black lacings (sometimes also blue or red) are sewn over the toe part of the canvas to the heel part and wound to mid calf.

Mallorca: They wear black pumps, or, what we call, loafers (abatas).

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COSTUMES FOR MEN

The over all picture of the Mainland Catalan costume is a modification of the now out of fashion period costume from the times of George Washington. The historic folkloric groups would wear exactly that in every detail, including the net for the now absent wig, which they call "Ret," however, with the distinct Catalan Barretina. Of late, the heavy outer coat of knee-length with pockets and Ret for men is disappearing.